

USDI, Bureau of Land Management  
Burns District  
28910 Hwy 20 West  
Hines, Oregon 97738

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for

Strategic Fuel Breaks in the Three Rivers Resource Area  
Environmental Assessment  
OR-025-03-030

### INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed to analyze the impacts of implementing the Proposed Action (PA) to optimize wildland fire suppression efforts and promote firefighter and public safety by reducing ladder fuels (thinning, limbing, and/or pruning) and overstocked understory from ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and grand fir stands within 100 feet of either side of the identified roads. Along the identified roads, the PA includes reducing western juniper within 100 feet on either side; utilizing hand piling, mechanical piling, and fall burning of slash piles; brush beating Wyoming big sagebrush, mountain big sagebrush, and basin big sagebrush as well as on trails where sagebrush is likely to be the primary fuel source carrying fire through the area.

### SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Burns District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to conduct approximately 320 miles of fuels treatments within strategic fuels planning units to optimize wildfire suppression activities and provide greater levels of safety in the Three Rivers Resource Area (RA). This would be accomplished through mechanical fuels treatments such as brush beating sagebrush, noncommercial understory thinning of coniferous trees, overstory reduction of western juniper, mechanical and hand piling of slash, and fall burning of slash piles. This proposal would be implemented over a 5 to 7-year period beginning with the Lone Pine, Silver Creek, and Poison Creek strategic fuels planning units which potentially contain some of the highest Wildland Urban Interface acres.

The strategic fuels planning units (roughly 1,000,000 acres) encompass the northwest, northeast, and southeast portions of the RA and cross land management and ownership boundaries. This EA analyzes treatments on Public Lands only.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

This proposal is in conformance with the various Federal laws, regulations, and executive orders and with objectives and land use plan allocations in the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP). The PA would maintain and help protect important habitats for Bureau Special Status species, including sage-grouse. The PA is also in compliance with management direction established in the 1992 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Three Rivers RMP, specifically:

Fire Management Objective FM 1: as determined through values at risk analysis (Map FM-1), maximize the protection of life, property, and high value sensitive resources from the detrimental effects of wildfire (Three Rivers RMP/ROD, page 2-102).

This PA is also in compliance with State, Tribal, and local regulations and policies.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other information, I have determined that the PA and alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

### Rationale:

This determination is based on the following:

All potentially affected resources were analyzed in the EA specific to the PA. The following elements are not known to be present or would not be affected by the PA or alternatives: Floodplains, wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, realty, environmental justice, and hazardous materials. With regard to any Special Status species mentioned in this document; the proposed treatments would not trend any of the Special Status species toward listing.

Effects to the resources analyzed in the EA are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects discussed in the EA have been disclosed. The physical and biological effects are limited to the RA. Under 0.5 percent (roughly 4,000 acres) of the project area (1,000,000 acres) would be treated over a 5 to 7-year implementation timeline. While the risks of increased opportunities for weed introduction would be elevated in the short term (<5 years) with implementation of this alternative, the overall benefits which are likely to result from reducing the potential of large wildfires in the area far outweigh those risks. Further, the brush beating portions of the treatments would allow for some age class diversity within the sagebrush community, while protecting the area from large-scale fire disturbances which negatively affect all of the individual resources, including Bureau Special Status species of wildlife such as the sage-grouse.

2. Public health and safety would not be adversely affected. Safety would be increased for firefighters and the public through the optimization of fire suppression activities.
3. There would be no adverse effects to wetlands, floodplains, areas with unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas because these resources have been specifically addressed in the project design elements. Ecological integrity would be maintained through the optimization of fire suppression activities.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment because resource protection has been specifically addressed in the project design elements.
5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature. The EA describes project design elements that reduce potential consequences to a minimal or nonexistent level and addresses the major issues identified early in the analysis process; the major issues include:
  - Wildlife habitat reduction
  - Effects on Special Status plant and animal populations
  - Noxious weeds establishment
  - Historical and cultural concerns
  - Riparian vegetation and water quality concerns

The effects on these resources are minimal because of the detailed project design elements referenced in Chapter 2 of the EA.

6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of the Three Rivers RMP, 1992.
7. No cumulative effects related to other actions that would have a significant adverse effect were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural resource surveys, and avoiding disturbance activities in known sites, no adverse effects to cultural resources were identified or anticipated.
9. No adverse effects to any Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat were identified in the EA. If at a future time there could be the potential for adverse effects to Threatened or Endangered species, guidelines or stipulations would be immediately modified so as to not have an adverse effect, or a new analysis would be conducted.
10. The PA alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.
11. There are no known adverse effects that would occur to energy development, production or distribution.

12. Consequences to migratory birds are minimal because of the detailed project design elements prepared to minimize habitat loss and to preserve mountain shrubs and other less represented wildlife habitat of importance to migratory birds.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature on File

Joan M. Suther  
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

\_\_\_\_\_  
7/20/2004

Date